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ABSTRACT

This publication deals with the topic of staff development for multicultural education and examines how schools should prepare their staffs for implementing an education that is truly multicultural. The document begins ("Tell Me What You've Learned So Far") by reporting on a staff development research study conducted by Christine E. Sleeter, Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Her study was conducted to determine how much teachers benefited from quantitatively intensive staff development experiences in multicultural education--experiences that were, however, representative of the content with which most teachers are presented during workshops or inservices on multicultural education. In an interview, Sleeter tells about the study, her findings, as well as implications for the restructuring of schools. In a second interview ("Telling the Whole American Story"), James Carroll, a teacher/participant in Sleeter's 2-year multicultural education staff development project reflects on what he gained from the experience and what remains to be done for multicultural education in public schools. (LL)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

In this issue of RESEARCH AND THE CLASSROOM we turn our attention to the topic of staff development for multicultural education. In the Summer 1992 issue of our quarterly, FOCUS IN CHANGE, we presented a substantive discussion of the goals and desired effects of multicultural education. But how do (and should) schools prepare their staffs for the challenges of implementing an education that is truly multicultural?

We decided to seek an answer to that question in this publication. Christine E. Sleeter, Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and scholar of multicultural education, discusses some provocative findings of a staff development/research study she conducted between 1988-90 in two Wisconsin districts.

Sleeter wanted to learn how much teachers benefited from quantitatively intensive staff development experiences in multicultural education—experiences that were, however, representative of the content with which most teachers are presented during workshops or inservices on multicultural education. In our interview with her, she tells about the study and her interesting research findings—as well as their implications for the restructuring of schools.

We also interviewed a teacher/participant in the staff development project. In our conversation with him, he reflects on what he gained from the experience, and what remains to be done for multicultural education in public schools. His name as well as the names of the two Wisconsin districts have been changed to protect the anonymity of the districts and participants in the staff development study.

If you are not a member of NCESRD, you have been selected to receive this issue of RESEARCH AND THE CLASSROOM on a trial basis. We invite you to join us now—and enter the discussion of the key educational topics that we address both in this publication and our lengthier quarterly, FOCUS IN CHANGE.

FALL 1992 No. 2

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"Tell Me What You've Learned So Far..."

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

How much—and what type of—staff development is sufficient to effect long-lasting change? Does staff development succeed in changing the school as an organization? In the controversial area of multicultural education, can a staff development intervention adequately prepare teachers to enact curricular and instructional change in their classrooms, or must they first spend considerable time expanding their awareness of racial and cultural issues?

Christine E. Sleeter, Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and scholar of multicultural education, set out to find out the answers to these questions. The story of the study and her findings can be found in her most recent book, Keepers of the American Dream: A Study of Staff Development and Multicultural Education (Falmer Press, 1992).

Christine Sleeter's deep-rooted curiosity about the effectiveness of staff development for multicultural education—coupled with her own passionate commitment to multicultural education—coalesced into a two-year staff development project and research study intended to advance understanding of staff development efforts in multicultural education.

Sleeter, whose personal investment in multicultural education is clearly evident as she describes the study and her findings, recalls the genesis of the project. "I wanted to find out what teachers actually got out of such an effort," she begins.

However, whatever optimism she felt at the beginning of the project was tempered with a healthy dose of realism about the present structure of schools.

"I figured this staff development project probably wasn't going to transform the schools," she says dryly, "but I thought that in working with people more intensively than is usual with one-shot workshops, something would end up translating itself into what teachers actually did in the classrooms. Therefore, I wanted to set up the staff development program with the accompanying research component in order to find out what teachers learned."

The project, which was privately funded, was planned to last two years, and was designed to offer ten all-day sessions the first year and five all-day sessions the second year. Sessions were held at a regional staff development center.

Teachers from two urban Wisconsin districts applied to be accepted into the project, and the thirty selected participants represented grades preschool through high school. Both districts have populations in which the percentage that is racial minority has grown steadily over the past two decades.

Procedurally, Sleeter and her colleague Susan Gould, associate at the regional staff development center, worked with an advisory committee to structure the sessions, and also elicited suggestions from the participating teachers during the first all-day workshop. Finally, national as well as local consultants were engaged to address a specific range of topics that formed the structure for the workshops' content.

Sleeter says, "We structured sessions that are not atypical of the kinds of staff development sessions that are normally done with teachers in multicultural education. The only atypical part of the project was that quantitatively it was more than what teachers usually get."

Choosing fairly typical multicultural content for the project was deliberate, because, as Sleeter explains, "I wanted to find out what teachers would actually learn from this content."

Her research method was ethnographic. During the two-year span of the study, Sleeter observed participating teachers in their classrooms and interviewed them each three to five times. While she was conducting her research observations in teachers' classrooms, she took note of categories that included classroom layout and decorations, student composition and behavior, materials used, content of lessons, instructional strategies, teacher-student interaction patterns, and decision-making patterns of teachers.

As the project progressed, were Sleeter's initial impressions confirmed by later findings? She thinks for a while before responding, "During the first year, I was optimistic, partly because the teachers were so enthusiastic. When I would interview them, as well as when I watched and listened to them during the staff development sessions, they were very enthusiastic. Some wouldn't agree with what they heard, but they had lively discussions.

"But by the end of the first year I was becoming aware of the patterns that I eventually reported. In terms of working with curriculum, the project was superficial. One common notion educators have is that multicultural education is something that you add on to what you are already doing instead of thinking of it as a way to redo your process of education."

She recalls a question that turned out to be especially revealing, one she asked of the participating teachers during her interviews: "Tell me what you've learned so far."

She says, "Most of them would describe awareness-level things. They would, in fact, use the phrase 'I've become more aware of how students learn, and I'm becoming aware of their learning styles. I'm becoming aware that when students are talking to each other, maybe that's because they have a cooperative learning style and they're not cheating. And so now I can see that if I used a little more cooperative learning, maybe that would make sense.'"

But a good portion of what the teachers were discovering during the project surprised her. "Their initial awareness levels ranged. There were four minority teachers whose awareness about the issues was

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considerably deeper than most of the white teachers. But some participants would say, 'I thought all the social problems had gotten solved during the 1960s, and now you're telling me that they're still here.'"

She explains, "They felt that teachers were being blamed for social problems. However, some became more aware that the curriculum wasn't as diverse as they thought it was. Some of them who actually did a textbook analysis would say, 'I realize you can read several pages and just see white kids. I never thought about that before.'"

Did their growing awareness of racial and cultural issues extend to how they taught in their classrooms? Sleeter reflects, "In terms of what I saw them doing differently in their classrooms, the main change was that they did start using more cooperative learning. Teachers got very interested in cooperative learning, partly because it's something that is 'in' right now, but partly because it's something you can fit into what you're teaching."

She is quick to explain. "You can use cooperative learning to teach the textbook better, which isn't something that I would necessarily recommend, because cooperative learning raises a lot more possibilities besides how to process the textbook."

Although an increase in cooperative learning was the main change that Sleeter observed, another finding was a shift in who teachers directed questions to in the classroom. She explains, "They started focusing more on the minority students, particularly the Black boys, trying to ask more questions and give more praise to them. In fact, there was a striking increase in the amount of attention they were directing towards minorities."

She continues, "Although our primary focus was race and culture rather than gender, we had one speaker who talked about gender bias in the classroom. Shortly after that, I did a series of observations. Up to that time, boys had been getting a disproportionate amount of attention, and then right after the speaker, teachers started monitoring their gender behavior in the classroom. They called on and praised girls proportionately to boys. After that, they went back to the pattern of giving the boys more attention."

She points out, "That was a good illustration of how you can make people aware of something, and the awareness will stick with them for a while, but unless there is a really systematic intervention to try to achieve permanent change, they return to how they did things before."

Some teachers tried to experiment with their curriculum, Sleeter says, particularly teachers in elective subject areas or special education. "They had the most latitude," she says. "They didn't have textbooks that they felt they had to follow. Teachers in regular elementary education tended to follow the textbook and didn't see curriculum, for the most part, as something they could play with."

Another strand woven throughout the project was called "Teachers as Leaders." Sleeter explains it as an effort to see if individual teachers could be change agents for their schools as a whole. "The idea was to train these teachers and have them return to their buildings and work as change agents. We spent some time in the sessions working with them on that, on strategies to use when they returned to their buildings to share the information they had been receiving."

But dual inhibitors of success could be found in the level of sophistication of the sessions' content coupled with their principals' lack of interest in what teachers were learning and how it could be used in their schools. "The teachers were learning the ABCs of multicultural education themselves. However, it become apparent to me in listening to them that most of the principals didn't view the teachers' participation as a resource into which they could tap for expertise in school-wide change. They seemed to be sending the teachers to the project because it would be good for them as individuals.

"When I would ask the teachers about speaking to their principals, about half seemed to believe that the principal wasn't that interested in what they were doing. They would say, 'The principal is pretty busy,' or 'The principal listens when I give him a report but hasn't had time for me to share it with the staff.'"

Sleeter acknowledges that the level of principal support varied, but only one principal in the study perceived the teacher as an important resource. "That principal would sit down with the teacher and talk at some length. They would share ideas and discuss what could be implemented into the school."

Sleeter says that her findings have implications for restructuring schools, implication that are deeply disturbing. "Most of the teachers in the study were white, and most teachers out in the schools are white," she notes. "The proportion of teachers who are white is increasing, while the proportion of students who are of color is increasing. I think that most white people will get only so far in thinking from a multicultural perspective, because most have not lived in minority communities, have not lived in minority families, don't have strong contacts with minority people, and their own day-to-day experience doesn't provide much of a repertoire for learning about another American culture or learning how racism works.

"Even those teachers who were aware of social problems had difficulty conceptualizing and thinking in terms of strengths and aspirations that minority people have. Their whole life orientation has been to be color blind or to think of people of color in terms of problems."

She says urgently, "You can give teachers words, you can give them things to read, you can try to give them strategies, but a lot of experience just isn't there."

Sleeter reflects on her personal experience as a white person deeply interested in and committed to multicultural education. "When I think about what I've gone through as a white person in order to try to learn to think from a multicultural perspective, I know it is something you just don't get in this sort of staff development effort, no matter how it is set up. The study made me think more about that.

"In my own teacher education program, we try to recruit students of color, but we don't do enough. I work with the students

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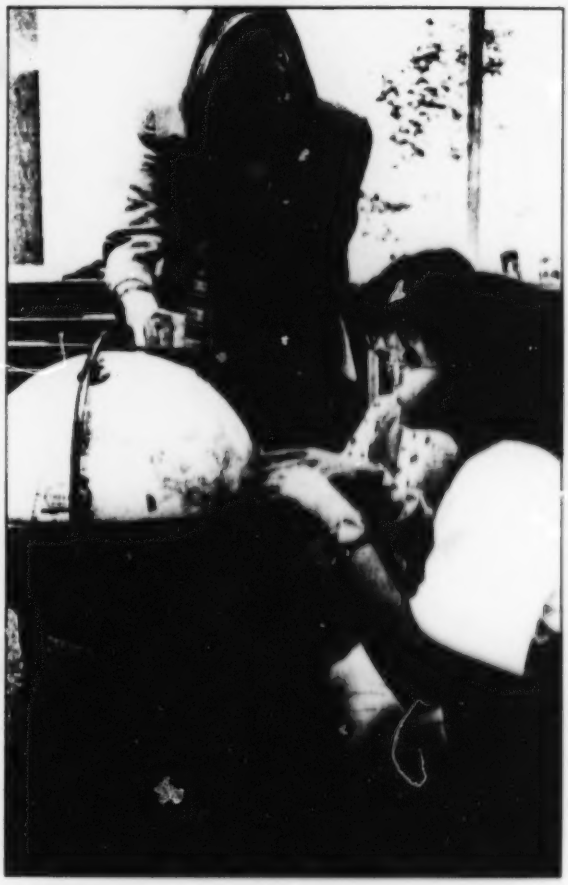
in my preservice program and try to give them the best education I know how to give them, but I still know that there are many limitations if you have never lived in a minority community."

How then, can schools change to provide an education for all children that is truly multicultural? In her answer, Sleeter presents a bleak view of the present quality and nature of schools, and proposes dramatic changes in their organization.

"Systemic change will not occur through an individual teacher's decision to do something different," she states. "Also, the structured nature of the curriculum and the testing program can provide an excuse not to change. The tracking program and various kinds of pull-out programs are a big factor too. When I asked teachers to describe their students — especially the teachers in the regular education program — they would describe them frequently in terms of labels, as being gifted or LD or bilingual or Chapter I or slow students or average students or 'My students who are repeaters.'"



She adds, "Although this isn't a new concept, I was struck by the way that teachers perceived their role as transmitting this codified curriculum to thirty kids in a certain amount of time. They talked a lot about time, about having to rush through all the things they were supposed to teach in the given amount of time that they had.

"The kids who could manage that were viewed as average students who belonged in the classroom. The kids who, for one reason or another, had difficulty or completed the work too fast and then had nothing to do, become problematic to the teacher who would need to find some place to put them or some kind of support services for them so that they could keep marching along."

Sleeter remarks that the study compelled her to think more about working with schools as organizations. "As I watched the teachers function in their own classrooms, I became more aware of connections between their classrooms and the rest of the school as well as the school district system."

Does she have a vision of the organization of a school that would be conducive to multicultural education? Sleeter's answer is provocative. "We would get rid of tracking, of most of the categorical programs that we have. We might have temporary or short-term ways to group kids to work on particular things, but the way we classify kids should end. I think we would have a multicultural staff. It's hard for me to see an all-white staff doing a good job with multicultural education. Actually, I think a school staff should be no more than fifty percent white."

Ruefully, Sleeter acknowledges potential critics, saying, "People will say I'm really idealistic asking for that." She continues, "We would open up more things to play around with, such as, would we assign thirty kids to one teacher? Would we be able to do more flexible kinds of team teaching? Would we have kids at all one age level, or would we also implement more family kinds of grouping, such as combining different ages? Probably we should have more parents in the building, kids and teachers out in the community doing things, instead of such a fixed curriculum."

Is it realistic to expect such dramatic change in schools? Sleeter's response is emphatic and immediate. "They're going to have to change," she says, "and I'm not sure if they're going to change from within the education system. Given the changes in the demographics in the United States, given the intense frustration that growing numbers of people feel, that we could see in Los Angeles, things will have to change."

However, Sleeter is quick to acknowledge that the current picture of schooling is not hopeless; some reform efforts are promising.

"There are some schools and some teachers that have done amazing things, such as genuine bilingual schools or the schools in New Haven that James Comer has worked with. Very significant changes are not impossible.

"Basically, I believe in public education. I'm not sure that the changes are going to be smooth; I'm not sure that the changes are going to come from within or whether the pressure to change will come from without. I get scared about increased privatization of schools, because we could end up building a two-class system of private schools for the 'haves' and public schools for the 'have-not's'—and I get very concerned about that. But really, with the changes in demographics, the pressure is on schools to change, and pressures to change in the direction of multicultural education are going to get stronger, and not weaker."

TELLING THE WHOLE AMERICAN STORY

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

What was it like to participate in the multicultural education staff development project and research study? Is it possible to provide an education that is multicultural within the present structure of schools? To get answers to these questions, we talked to James Carroll, now Coordinator of Multicultural Education for the New Denmark public schools. Carroll, whose heritage is African American, reflects on the staff development experience and how it has affected his present work.

James Carroll radiates a calm thoughtfulness that makes it easy to discuss the controversial—and politicized—topic of multicultural education. Eager to reflect on his experience as a participant in Christine Sleeter's two-year multicultural education staff development project, he says, "Overall, I felt that the project helped me become much more sensitive and aware of a lot of things that were going on around me. It also helped me become more astute in helping students deal with a lot of problems that occur."

Carroll explains that he applied for selection in the project because he began to see substantial changes in the study body. "About 1980 I saw a change in the population of students with whom I was working. I noticed that socioeconomic factors were changing and relationships between students were changing. These were things that I had to deal with."

A quick look at New Denmark's demographics at the senior high level reflects its growing diversity: The district senior high enrollment is 5,972; its racial/ethnic distribution is 19.7% African American, 8.2% Hispanic, and 72.1% "other." Of those students, approximately 10.6% are categorized as low income.

Carroll speaks frankly of racial situations and how a teacher's mediation skills can defuse a potentially explosive scenario.

"One day in my class, I had a student who came up to me and indicated that another student had made a racial comment. I had to decide how I was going to deal with it. I had a class going on, actually about five different projects going on simultaneously. The question I was confronted with was: Do I drop everything? Instead, I asked the students to give me a few minutes, and told them that after I finished with the other students I would deal with it. I decided it was something to be dealt with outside of the classroom.

"I saw six students together. We talked about the incident, and everybody gave their viewpoint. The comment, which had been made by a white female student, was along the lines that all Blacks are violent.

"I gave them examples of how stereotypes can occur. For instance, if a student went to a predominately white school and saw a fight going on, would she assume that all whites are violent because of that?

"They provided some constructive comments and some criticism, so it wasn't just me—an adult—lecturing to them. Basically, the incident wasn't that serious. Once the kids were in a situation where they could work it out themselves in a constructive manner, my role was to mediate. And they did work it out."

To Carroll, this incident demonstrates how both students and teachers need to raise their awareness of racial and cultural issues. He illustrates how students can resist concepts central to multicultural education with a vivid example. "Let's say there is a Black history class. There are a lot of cases where African American students don't take the class because they say, 'I'm African American; what more is there for me to learn about me?'

"There's a lot more to learn," he continues, "because when we talk about multicultural education we are not just talking about black and white—we're talking about a very diverse country."

When Carroll evaluates the experience provided by participation in the two-year staff development project, he believes that its biggest strength was to provide a setting where teachers of different races and cultural heritages could communicate openly with one another.

"We were in a setting where we could enlighten one another and share, whereas normally in a regular school setting those issues do not come up. We all have our biases about things, and one thing I found out was that when you don't share things with people you assume that something is only happening to you or only happening to a certain group of people."

Although Sleeter found that the staff development project affected participating teachers mostly at an awareness level, Carroll found just reaching the awareness level positive and beneficial. "It still takes the initiative of the educator to go one step further," he says candidly. "I felt for the lone person who had to go back and try to enlighten her peers and create an awareness in her building. That's very hard to do.

"In fact, during the project I noted that there definitely is a need for a core of educators from the same site to participate, because when they go back to the school site, they're going to need to share their ups and downs with someone who understands where they're coming from and what they're talking about."

Currently, Carroll says he is building from the two-year experience. No longer a teacher, he has assumed an administrative position as Coordinator of Multicultural Education for the district of New Denmark. In his current position, he says, "We have been working on strategic plans for multicultural education. I have been focusing on a community span, which simply means gathering information within the community and then allowing communication to develop among the diverse community groups within the school."

He points to an imaginative project that

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has evolved from a creative consideration of community resources. "We have generated a list of African American males in the community—from doctors to lawyers to social workers to the dad who is really the average person. The program focuses on African American males at the high school level, who are one of our top priorities in this community because of gang involvement."

He says, "We try to let students know that their role model is right there in their homes, that they don't have to seek out someone like a Michael Jordan or someone who is a star."

The program encourages the African American men from the community to come into the school and talk to African American male students in an informal setting. "They simply talk about their experience as an African American male," Carroll explains, "and talk about their failures, their successes, and how they have dealt with issues. I think it's important that the students see that African American male adults also have problems, but they have to work them out. They begin to see that there are other ways besides violent or unconstructive ways of being able to resolve problems. The kids are really interested, and ask a lot of questions that they wouldn't have the opportunity to ask during the school day."

The staff development project caused Carroll to reflect more upon the needs of teachers in his district for multicultural education. "They need inservice," he says, "and lots of it."

But obviously the quality—and quantity—of any staff development intervention must be considered carefully, and Carroll agrees with Sleeter that the present structure of schools inhibits many otherwise promising staff development efforts.

Given the difficulty of changing long-held attitudes and beliefs, he believes it is necessary to first facilitate a new awareness of race and culture. "First of all, teachers need to know about awareness and sensitivity on multicultural issues, and how it fits into multicultural education," he says. "A lot of materials on multicultural education are also mixed in with a lot of political issues. We as educators need to focus simply on the educational approach. I strongly believe that we have a diverse group of students and we need to at least become aware of some of the unintentional as well as the intentional things that go on that we have a tendency to deny."

Carroll points out that inservice held before or after school is not what he is advocating. "I'm talking about quality time where teachers are relieved from the classroom to be able to really concentrate and not worry about having to dash back to the school."

But it is difficult—if not nearly impossible—to cram a qualitatively and quantitatively adequate staff development effort into an already stuffed school year. Carroll says, "One little seed I have been trying to plant, not just in this district, but in my visits to other districts, is that unions are looking for money from school boards for inservice. If we are going to keep our profession at a quality level, the unions could offer inservice in areas of concern. Teachers pay a lot of money into unions.

"If the concern is racial issues or violence in schools, maybe the school system could form a partnership with the union where they could share the bill for some ongoing inservice."

What about inservice specifically designed to alter the curriculum from a Eurocentric curriculum to a multicultural one? Carroll answers, "We're going through that right now in the social studies, and we have been looking at multicultural education reform concepts. A lot of them start with the social studies."

Although perhaps the social studies are the most natural place to begin curricular change for multicultural education, Carroll admits that using the social studies as a starting point causes him some concern. "A lot of times, efforts start in the social studies, and do a good job, but then they stop there and don't venture out into the arts and English and math."

State requirements can also be problematic. Carroll says, "In Wisconsin, Native American history is a state requirement. How do you explain this to African American parents in the community who want African American history to be a requirement? And if we make that a requirement, then Hispanics and other ethnic groups will want their own history.

"That is why," Carroll says emphatically, "it is important to focus on multicultural education. Multicultural education tells the whole American story in terms of diversity and contributions.

"The bottom line," he adds with some heat, "is to turn out productive citizens with an understanding of differences, who are able to see differences not as something negative, but as something unique and invaluable."

Does Carroll have an opinion as to why Sleeter's study showed little lasting effect on the classroom teaching of participants? "First of all," he replies, "the whole school district did not buy into the project. It was definitely voluntary, and it should be mandatory. We can't keep whining about the problems that exist, and then when staff development is made available not buy into it. That means there has to be some sharing and understanding at all different levels.

"The administrative body is going to have to understand the teachers' needs, and the teacher has to understand the students' needs, and parents have to understand the teachers' needs, and so on."

Does he believe that an education that is truly multicultural for all children is possible? "I'm an optimist," Carroll replies calmly. "In this country, we've struggled with a lot of things. If we study history, we see that we've been able to work things out. With the right leadership, people who are willing to work and support the concept of diversity can make change happen."

He adds, "This may sound corny, but I'll say it anyway. The last four letters in the word 'American' say 'I Can.' If we don't change, all we will see is that the problems will increase to the point where we won't be able to deal with them. And the next time you talk to me, yes, I'll be very pessimistic. But I think we can work it out."

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